Hospital History

By Liisa Penner

It just occurred to me this morning that I've been a patient in four hospitals in this area. When I was 16 I caught pneumonia and was placed in Columbia Hospital on 16th Street. That must have been about 1956. In 1960 my son was born at the Tongue Point Navy Hospital. I remember going into labor for the first time and saying "Ouch, that hurts!" and the nurse told me, "It's going to hurt a lot worse." And it did! In spite of that I had two more children. My older daughter was born at St. Mary's Hospital because I had a friend who worked there. Then almost fifteen years later I had surprise baby, another daughter, born at Columbia Memorial Hospital.

A little background on the history of hospitals and medical care in Astoria

The Fur Traders

In 1811 a group of men arrived here sent by John Jacob Astor to establish a trading post at what is now 15th and Exchange Streets. In August and September of 1812, they finished building a house 45 x 30 feet in size. This was used as a hospital for the sick and a lodging house for the mechanics.

The post was taken over by the British in 1813 and then in a settlement several years after the War of 1812 ended, the place was restored to U.S. In 1818 a map of the buildings was drawn by Lieutenant T. Saumaros which shows a building (Number 4) that was described as a dwelling house and hospital 15 feet by 15 feet in size. According to a map later drawn up by Judge Buchanan it was located on Exchange Street just east of 15th Street not far from where the Heritage Museum is now. This map was made by Judge J.A. Buchanan, the grandfather of our longtime volunteer, Carol Lambert.

Hospital

In 1825 the Hudson Bay Company had moved their main operations to Fort Vancouver but left a person in charge of a store here until the late 1840s. With the removal of the Hudson Bay Company the buildings decayed and there was little to show that this was once a busy place.

Americans from the states in the east began arriving in 1840, most notably the Methodist missionaries. Wagon trains began bringing families from the east in 1843, settling on Clatsop Plains and along the Columbia and smaller waterways, and present day Astoria, most determined to farm the land. Among the settlers were a few men who had some training as physicians. In 1850 there was 25-year-old Curtis Trenchard and 63-year-old W. Demery. In 1860 there was Jonas Lamphire, 76 years old and in 1870 T.K. Dunbar and Stephen Kinsey. A woman, F. Baltis, was listed on that census as doing nursing.

A mortality schedule was kept with the census for 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 with a hint of the kind of health problems that people here met up with. The mortality schedule was a list of the people who had died in the previous year. It covered only one year. In 1850 5 people died, 3 of dysentery, 1 of typhus and one in childbirth. In 1860 two died, one of inflammation and one of liver disease. In 1870, five people died, one of stomach inflammation, one born prematurely, one poisoned and two drowned. In 1880 thirteen people had died in the previous year, six died of diphtheria, 1 cholera, 1

drowned, 1 of paralysis, 1 of abcess, 1 of lung hemorrhage, 1 of whooping cough and 1 of consumption (Tuberculosis). (My sister and I both had whooping cough in the 1940s and remember how awful that was. That is why it is so important to get those shots.)

Reminiscences of Johan Nels Anderson noted that in 1850, his family and others bought roots of the Indians for medicinal purposes.

Before there was an understanding of the cause of disease, the climate or bad air was often blamed. As a result people who were seriously ill here often felt compelled to move south to a warmer climate or some other place. In some cases it did not help and they returned to this area. They might also leave to stay in a hospital in a larger settled area.

The county sometimes took on the responsibility for the care of people who were sick or injured, those who were unable to care for themselves, including those with dementia or insanity and children whose parents had died or abandoned them. The county would then contract with someone to furnish care for them and often they had to do work for people they were placed with. Farmers could get cheap labor that way. It often was not a happy experience. I read about the case in which an elderly man was placed with a family and had to work for them. He wanted to know why he had not been paid for his work and they told him they were paid to take care of him and that his work was to help pay for his food and clothes. So he went to court and sued them. I think he lost the suit.

It was the person who said he could board a person at the lowest cost who won the bid to take care of him. The county officials felt it was their responsibility to take the lowest bid. The newspaper records that one woman who won the bid to feed the indigents. She was Bridget Grant, well-known for the shanghaiing business carried on with her sons, responsible for the misery of the men she shanghaied.

In later years, the county built a house for these people to live in. It was generally called the "poor house" but others preferred the more pleasant sounding name of "county home." It was near the present location of the 4-H Fair Grounds out near Highway 202. It was not always a pleasant place to stay. Residents there were expected to work in the garden and take care of the farm animals. After the county home was closed, residents found a new home in a section of St. Mary's Hospital.

Back to the early years before St. Mary's and before the Columbia and Columbia Memorial Hospital there was only one hospital in Astoria. It was not for the general public however. This was the Marine Hospital.

U.S. Marine Hospital

This hospital was to serve merchant seamen who paid a yearly fee and thus were granted the right to go to any marine hospital in the country. There were many of these hospitals spread around the country adjacent to major waterways. I seem to remember but can't find the source that the hospital was located on Exchange between 11th and 12th. In 1873 local physicians included Doctor S.W. Dodd who was the quarantine officer for the Port of Astoria and Doctor S. Kinsey Superintendent of the U.S. Marine Hospital. This may have been the same building that was used by the seaman's minister

Johnston McCormac who rescued seamen from the clutches of the Shanghaiers and tried to lead them in to pursuits other than drinking and gambling. It was probably located there in the 1860s and 1870s. I don't know the beginning date of the Marine Hospital, but it was closed down by the federal government in the 1870s in spite of a huge outcry from residents. The nearest U.S. Marine hospital was at Portland. It was a trip of several hours to get there.

> **November 20, 1877 Daily Astorian Within four years Astorians have seen the tidal station at this post removed, the marine hospital removed and have listened to threats of abolishing our customs district...**
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> **From the newspaper of April 25 1879 – There are sick sailors in this port who have to be kept at private houses at ship's expense for want of a marine hospital. How high is that for a first class port. We shall ventilate this business in a few days.**

Ft. Stevens Hospital

In the early 1860s, after the start of the Civil War, the U.S. government took land belonging to the Schwatka family on Clatsop Plains. They did not pay the family for the land they took until many years had passed. The family had to fight for payment. The Schwatka Mountains in Alaska were named for one son was a famous explorer in the 1870s and 1880s. On this land the government took from the family , they built fortifications and housing for soldiers.

According to Marshall Hanft's book *Fort Stevens: Oregon's Defender of the River of the West,* reprinted in 2003, A hospital was authorized there on 6 Aug 1866 and constructed in 1866-1867 at a cost of $2,842.96. It was a rectangular building 1 story high consisting of two sections. The main building was 46 feet 10 inches long, 25 feet 6 inches wide. An addition on it was 24 feet 2 Inches long, 22 feet and five inches wide.

It had a 5 bed ward at each end of main building

Dispensary at front center stewards room

Kitchen pantry, bathroom, water closet, each ward had five windows, store room in attic, reached water closet through outside back porch, torn down in _____, new one built _____

The hospital was to serve the military men stationed there and nearby areas and probably also the civilians working at Fort Stevens. These civilians included washerwomen and other women working there. The Fort Stevens cemetery contains the bodies of civilian men and women in addition to soldiers. The hospital also served to help others like the following fisherman:

> Italian fisherman was picked up in a boat across from Ft. Stevens, lashed to boat, close to death. He had been floating several days in the boat and had gone out past the bar and out to sea. He was taken to the post hospital at Ft. Stevens.

Much of this information came from the website on the internet www.oregonnews.uoregon.edu

Go to the website, click search at top of page. Click on the newspaper you want, then type in a name you want to find like Arrigoni, small images of newspapers will appear. Click on them to enlarge.

Simon N. Arrigoni, an Italian from Milan, visited at a home in Ireland where a young girl lived and they began a romance, against the father's wishes. The girl, Elizabeth, ran off with Simon. They lived on board ship for a while, lived in various places, then moved to Portland in 1850 where they operated one of the earliest hotels there. They proved to be very successful.

In April 1869 it was annunced in the Portland newspapers that SN Arrigoni would operate a hotel in Astoria owned by Capt. George Flavel, to be called the Occident. Flavel built it on the south side of Bond Street, on the corner of 10th. The building on that spot now is known as the Occident Building. Across the street was Capt. Flavel's wharf. The hotel was a convenient spot for people docking at the wharf to stay the night. The July 3, 1873 noted that Simon Arrigoni was probably the most popular host in America and equal to almost any emergency.

In 1874 the couple had their silver wedding anniversary with lots of people attending the celebration but the next year it was reported that the couple was leaving on ship for California in hopes that the trip would improve Simon's health. They returned to Astoria and the couple threw themselves into building a hotel of their own and constructing several other buildings. Only a week after it was announced that the new hotel was to be finished by June 10, 1876, Simon Arrigoni died. Mrs. Arrigoni was left with a pile of bills for construction. The builders wanted their money and she was unable to pay them. The property, the buildings and the furnishings, described as "elegant" all went up for sale to pay the bills. Mrs. Arrigoni began operating a boarding house and restaurant on 9th Street. She finally gave up and moved to Portland where she operated a lodging house. She advertised in the Astoria paper inviting her Astoria friends to patronize her business there.

In July 1920, Elizabeth Arrigoni died at the age of 91, leaving her children Mrs. Frances McVicar, Astoria and Mrs. N.D. Staples Astoria, Mrs. Roland Stillwell, Portland, Mrs. Harry Brandt at Yakima and Simon Arrigoni of Astoria who ended up spending the rest of his life working for the Astoria fire department.

We sort of off topic by talking about the Arrigoni family, but it is due to them that we had the first public hospital and in a way of speaking, the one these hospital buildings here are a direct link to going back in time.

Health Problems.

What sort of health problems did the early resident have here? One way is to look for cause of death in the people buried in the cemetery at the top of the hill in Astoria. Joyce Morrell did two books on the cemetery with obituaries. She copied all these out by hand after scrolling through microfilm of Astoria newspapers. Now you can just print the pages you want without having to go through all that work. For

Astoria's population

There were fewer women than men here in the early years.

Newspapers started in the mid 1860s in Astoria just in time to record local reactions to the last days of the Civil War. For many reasons women were not often mentioned in the newspapers. One reason that there were fewer women than men here, but the number gradually rose. In 1870 for instance, there were 765 males and 490 females. Another reason that women did not show up as often in the newspaper was that the newspapers were expected to be read by men more and they made the buying decisions. Another reason was that men died more violent deaths. It was their bodies that washed up on shore after falling off the small two-man boats which so easily capsized in the rough water of the Columbia River. Other men died of gunshot wounds or knife stabs after becoming drunk in the many saloons in Astoria.

Joyce's book lists 71 drownings, all were men.

Other accidents 9 were men and 4 women

Suicide 4 were men and 2 women

Murder 6 were men and none women.

Heart disease was very common. 20 men died of it and 8 women

Consumption 18 men and 10 women

Typhoid fever 11 men and 3 women

The number of people dying of heart disease was a surprise because the average age of death was 38. The range was from 17 to 69.

The reasons for this are several

1. They were often exposed to contagious diseases that could cause damage to the heart
2. Their diets were high in salted foods and foods high in fats
3. Their bodies were over stressed by hard work, more than 10 hours a week
4. Men drank heavily. There were about four times as many saloons as now.
5. There were not good support systems to help the sick

Drownings of men accounted for the most deaths

Next came deaths of babies and young children. Scarlet fever, scarletina, cholera infantum, croup, convulsions, diphtheria, and fever.

One sad notice in the newspaper said

> "Only one year ago our first born son was laid to rest and now our second darling follows to join him among the blest.

Typhoid fever was common in certain areas, usually due to contaminated water or milk. Consumption could also be passed through the milk.

One good source for information about diseases can be found at the Oregon State Archives. They have a couple books labeled "Infectious Diseases." They list the names of the sick along with the diseases they have and their physicians and whether the lived or died.

So you can see we have a town of people who are in need of medical care. The situation was made worse by the fact that due to its location at the mouth of the Columbia there was a steady influx of visitors bringing with them diseases from all parts of the world.

The state of medicine until the 1920s was primitive. The best treatment of contagious diseases was to separate the sick from the rest of the community. In the early years they were confined to their homes and a sign was posted saying that no one could enter or leave the house

There were a few doctors here from early in Astoria's history who were trained in good medical institutions in the U.S. but there were also ones like Dr. Flettny in 1877 who claimed to have come from a London Private Hospital and could cure the sick, make the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear and the acute pain instantly relieved. Also no medicines given (with a number of exceptions).

In 1877, Mrs. Dr. Lou Patterson advertised that she was a clairvoyant physician and test medium, visiting at the Parker house and would see patients.

Another was Mrs. Dr. Burr who advertised that she was a homeopathic physician **and electrician** who treats all chronic diseases of women and children at her house (located near where McDonalds is now.)

We had druggists in the 1870s. W.E. Dement was the most noted. He advertised drugs, patent medicines paint, oil and glass, varnishes, brushes, wines and liquors – an odd combination of things for sale.

One article in the newspapers in the 1870s complains about the people who professed to be physicians and cure all sorts of illnesses, but were little better than murderers. The writer said we need good trained doctors who had attended respected medical schools, he said. People were beginning to be more discriminating.

The population of Astoria in 1880 was 7,222 and certainly in need of a hospital!

St. Mary's Hospital

The index to the Judgment Rolls shows a number of lawsuits going back and forth between S.N. Arrigoni and after his death with his wife Elizabeth, most related to construction of the new hotel, all culminating in its sale and the sale of the furniture. George W. Hume, whose family had started salmon canneries on the Columbia River, bought it. He in turn sold it for $5,500 to the Catholic Sisters of the Charity of Providence. Three members of the order arrived Astoria for duty: Sister Joseph of Arimathea, Superior; Sister James Kisal and Sister Mary Alexander.

In January 1881 there were six patients at St. Mary's.

it was announced that the patients were free to employ any physician they wanted and by April, they had about 20 patients.

By May 1881, St. Mary's hospital and the federal government made an agreement that the U.S. seamen who paid hospital dues would all be entitled to free care and attendence durng sickness. They would have to get permits from the Custom House to prove their eligibility. The cost of care for each mariner would be a dollar a day.

The sisters needed money to operate the hospital and the community jumped in to help. George Hill about whom almost nothing good could be said turned out to be a surprise. This man who ran a saloon, gambling house, a dance hall with prostitutes, who in the 1880s was said to be the boss of Astoria's Swilltown and paid voters with drinks to vote his way which was anything that would not interfere with his business. This was the man who put on entertainments to raise money for the hospital. At 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children, he raised $67.50 the second time he did this.

A fair to raise money was held by ladies of the town for St. Mary's in July. For several days the women volunteered to sell things they had made, serving refreshments and they had musical entertainment furnished by the Young Men's Western Band. Elizabeth Arrigoni was one of these community women donating her time and talent to this effort.

Rev. Benjamin Wistar Morris, who founded the Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland in 1875 and was bishop of the Episcopal church's missionary diocese of Oregon seems to have taken note of the efforts of Astorians to work for the success of a hospital run by Catholics. He sent out the message to all the clergy of the church that they should announce at church meetings that members should donate money to the Good Samaritan in Portland. This seems to have been the start of some rumblings by the non-Catholics about having the only hospital in the area run by Catholics.

Meanwhile the hospital had a variety of patients to deal with. In December 1881, there were six sailors from the ship C S Hurlburt in the hospital with scurvy. In July 1882, a fisherman shot himself accidently with his gun he tried to put in a bullet in chamber that was too big to fit easily so he took something and hammered it in. Then it fired. On the same day a fisherman fell from a wharf to the rocks below.

In May 1882, George Hills, who had raised money for the hospital, sent St. Mary's Hospital some business their way after a man was wounded at the Hills saloon. He later died at the hospital from his wounds. In July, the ladies of the community held another fair for the hospital. In August 1882, a policeman was shot. Then in December George Hills sent the hospital more business after a man was wounded in a shootout in his saloon.

In September 1882 it was announced that the Sisters of Charity had arranged to make some extensive improvements at St. Mary's Hospital. When they were complete, they said they would have isolation rooms for typhoid fever and cases of erysipelas (blood poisoning usually caused by streptococcus bacteria). They were also building on a comfortable piazza on the sunny side of the hospital.

During the year ending September 15, 1883, there had been 461 patients admitted to the hospital besides a large number of out patients who had been treated. Nearly every disease and injury that the human flesh is heir to was represented in the patients admitted, according to the newspaper. Out of the 461 patients there were 14 deaths, a rate of mortality amounting to a little more than three per cent.

The deaths were one person stabbed with a knife , 3 died from gunshot wounds, 1 from delirium tremens , 1 from purpura haemorrhagica, 1 from pneumonitis, 1 of general paralysis , 1 from valvular disease of heart , 3 from consumption (T.B.), 1 of old age, and 1 from a strangulated hernia.

No other hospital in the U.S. had such a low rate of mortality, the newspaper claimed. "The Sisters of Charity conducting the hospital deserve great credit for the good work they are doing. We blazon heroic deeds of men and crown those who win the victories of life; their names are written on the scrolls of fame and their memories perpetuated on the master rolls of history but no less worthy of praise is the quiet, lowly, unassuming sister of charity who unostentatiously devotes her existence to the alleviation of suffering in its most hideous forms and consecrates her life to a high idea of self-imposed duty.

In September 1884, Clatsop County contracted with the sisters of St. Mary's Hospital to furnish the poor with food, medical attendance, etc. for $5 each per week. Dr. Kinsey, formerly in charge of the U.S. Marine Hospital in Astoria in the 1870s, was now "the overseer of the poor." He objected to the $5.00 payment saying the hospital was feeding them too much food and he could do it cheaper. He took them out of the hospital and took them to his place but the county objected and he had to return them to the hospital.

Following Rev. Morris' direction, the Grace Episcopal church in Astoria raised $23.35 in December 1882 to send to Good Samaritan Hospital. But at the same time they did not forget St. Mary's and took them two boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables.

On January 20, 1886, St. Mary's reported that for the year 1885, they had admitted 400 patients. The deaths were:

12 cases of consumption, mostly from Finland

3 Brights disease, 2 liver problems, 2 typhoid fever, 2 heart disease, 2 apoplexy of the brain, 1 inflamation of bowels, 1 cancer (cause unknown), 1 exhaustion following operation and 3 from injuries.

There had been 20 cases of typhoid fever admitted. They still did not know the cause.

There had been numerous operations: amputations of all sorts, removing tumors, removing dead bone, cutting strictures, operating for stone in the bladder, tapping the chest (removing fluid from the chest cavity), and trepanning the skull.

There had not one case of blood poisoning as a result of operations.

The hospital was still caring for seamen and the poor. The county at this time had reduced the payment for the poor to $4.00 a week for each person.